**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):
*Allegro Barbaro* by Miklós Jancsó
William Kelly

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of love, her affair is not without its own sensual pleasure, genuine infatuation and even feeling—even if the primary impetus was, as she asserts, her attraction to the teacher's authority and power. Not even Anna Trajan is reduced; though aesthetically as well as humanly unpleasant—yellow skin, warts, and a passion for gorging cream cakes—she is not incapable of eliciting sympathy and respect. She carries the profound hurt of a past love with a married man with dignity, and is protective enough of Vera (the personal chosen over the Party rules) to try to prevent her public confession.

What is unambiguous in the film is Gabor's evocation of the self-criticism session, and his image of Vera's ultimate destiny. The session is presided over by a young, cold, contemptuous bureaucrat, who severely dresses down most of the students, leaving some of them in tears. The critiques feel canned and prescribed—telling old revolutionaries to lose their arrogance, intellectuals to learn to connect with ordinary workers, and others to be more aggressive. The prime value is placed on official approval and adherence to the Party line, not on the judgment of one's peers; and the Party is there to submerge any sign of independence and individuality. It's here that Vera shockingly confesses her affair with Istvan, apologizes for having done wrong, and throws herself on the mercy of the Party. Is her act a shrewd, calculated one, or the action of an insecure waif who loves the Party and its rigidities and rules more than anything else in the world? Gabor again leaves the interpretation of her behavior open. At the same time, her confession, with its destructive consequences for Istvan, has the force of a human obscenity, from which even she and her two mentors shrink later in horror. But the violation of the human that Vera commits is seen by the Party as an act of submission and a willingness to abdicate personal desire to party discipline, and it is exactly what is necessary to her success in the Party.

In the film's final scene, training concluded, Anna Trajan and Vera Angi ride back to Budapest in the sealed-off comfort of a limousine. Outside the car window, Maria Muskat passes on the road, laboriously but indomitably bicycling against the wind. Gabor's sympathies clearly lie with her, warm celebrator of the pleasure of the flesh and courageous defender of those attacked at the self-criticism session, champion of a hearty humanness. It is she who dominates the lyrical women's shower scene early in the film. Vera Angi, calling out through the car window to Maria—who doesn't hear her—has become severed from all that by her own devices and instincts, which propel her instead toward successful absorption into the Party bureaucracy. Vera's gain comes at an incalculable cost, and the sense of great tragic loss is unmistakable as the film closes. Perhaps Gabor's real subject is Hungary itself, neccessarily concealed by setting the film in 1948 and presenting it as a critique of the past to avoid its being taken as a comment on the present. However that may be, the loss is perhaps not total. The final image of Maria Muskat, though one of enormous struggle in contrast to the powerful machinery of the official limousine, conveys great tenacity—the will for survival.

*Angi Vera* is a small, realistic film which eschews stunning compositions and virtuoso camera angles for pans and cuts to people's faces. Gabor is a humanist who is on the side of human feelings and passions, antipathetic to the doctrinaire and puritanical, and he never resorts to polemic or bombast to make his point. What is most distinctive about this minor masterpiece is Gabor's gift for subtly capturing the vagaries of human behavior even in the most ideologically charged situations. In Vera herself, he and Veronika Papp have created a character whose multi-layered motivations make not for confusion, but for the mysterious complexity of human life itself.

—LEONARD AND BARBARA QUART

## ALLEGRO BARBARO

**Director: Miklós Jancsó. Script: Gyula Hernádi and Miklós Jancsó. Photography: János Kende.**

The name Miklós Jancsó and the long take have become nearly synonymous over the last 15 years. Since *The Round-Up,* his style has evolved toward an ever increasing intricacy of seamless choreographed camera and object movement. The ascendancy of the long take in the 12-shot film *Elektreia*

suggests that Jancsó's goal may have been to eliminate cutting altogether. That the sense of *Elektreia* would be only negligibly altered if the film had actually consisted of just one (technical difficulties aside) 76-minute shot indicates how unessential a role montage plays.

But this is definitely not the case with Jancsó's latest film *Allegro Barbaro*, in which montage works in a way that is central to the film's structure. True, there are only 22 shots, but within and among these shots Jancsó develops a new rigorous interrelationship between his montage and *mise en scène* that allows him to delineate changes in tense and point of view, and to open a whole new territory for his stylistic explorations.

As with his previous work, in this film Jancsó chronicles the shifting movements of oppressors and oppressed through the flux of history. Set in Hungary at the time of the Horthy regime's collaboration with Nazi Germany, the film centers on the story of István Zsadányi (György Cserhalmi), a member of the ruling class who is in love with Mari Bankós (György Tarján), a peasant who is the daughter of the leader of the peasant movement.

István's allegiance is divided between his social position and his personal life. In the first third of the film his attention fluctuates between the highest government officials (his brother Gábor and his old friend the prime minister) and radical peasants. István intercedes for Mari who has been arrested as a communist agitator; but before long he visits the prime minister's unconscionably opulent mansion. At István's own estate, the peasants are residents of what appears to be his utopian experiment/revolutionary training ground. Both the prime minister and the old Bankós—rival leaders of their respective classes—concur in their views of István: "He is of a different class. He won't change." Bankós opposes his daughter's marriage to István since he wonders if the young aristocrat's proposal isn't merely some whim. Bankós is arrested and István again uses his privileged position to mediate a release. István wins an ensuing power play against his brother and soldiers but, as he soon discovers, the victory is short lived.

The contradictions of István's position increase as the film proceeds. Circumstances force him to further incline toward the peasant class, and in doing so, his greatest inadequacy is uncovered: the inability to function as part of a group. These circumstances unfold as the elaborate rituals of István's and Mari's wedding are interrupted by the entrance of the prime minister who announces that István's estate is to be put under surveillance. In what is more of a threat than a plea, he tells István to stop his "half-Bolshie nonsense." Before long, Bankós is killed and the entire estate is occupied. An outraged István kills the prime minister, but it is designated an accident and Gábor is appointed the new prime minister.

István's behavior remains desultory because the assassination is, after all, an emotional response to the murder of Mari's father. This is hardly the stuff of commitment to a revolution. István is further put to the test as the realities of class conflict destroy any hope he may yet have had to continue his precarious balancing act. When István discovers Mari has been arrested on a trumped-up charge of murdering a soldier, his first action is to indulge in a fantasy in which Mari and himself embrace within a circle of dancing peasants. Finally, he pleads with Gábor, who is his last link to the old order. Not obtaining what he wants, István rides his bicycle behind some shrubbery and, incredibly, reappears on foot in a clothing change which implies a newfound commitment to the peasant cause: he wears a plain military jacket and carries a flag—the same Hungarian tri-color Bankós carried to his death.

This transformation is bizarre. Yet, when viewed in conjunction with other less extreme anomalous occasions that precede this particular scene, there emerges a discernible pattern of an increasing number of nonrealistic components appearing within an apparently realistic situation. These occasions arise when the appearance of an object, a movement of either an actor or an object, even an entire composition, strikes the viewer as odd or somewhat off-key in what is generally believed to be a realistic context. This eccentric mixture results in intermittent, brief lapses of credibility, and intimates that something might be amiss with the reality of what the viewer is watching—or that something may be wrong with the way the viewer is perceiving that reality. Bizarre as these occasions may be, they do not as yet contradict any narrative logic—that is to say they may be still accepted within a realistic context without causing

viewer incomprehension. That this is so is indicative of the persuasive power Jancsó manages to impart to each moment of the film through his use of spatial homogeneity and a specific historical milieu.

By using the long take, Jancsó has ample opportunity to place the anomalous object or action in the same space, and often at the same time as the normative action. In the long fluid takes there is such a rapid succession of events at various planes within the image that it is difficult to keep up with all of them. Hence, the viewer tends to see the anomalous occasion, along with the director's use of music and dance, not as any violation of the laws governing narrative logic (reality), but rather as a stylistic quirk, an exercise of poetic license; or, as has been the charge against Jancsó, another example of his "excessive mannerism." Rarely are we called upon in a film to sort out such a combination of incongruous elements in a homogeneous space, and we are caught unprepared to make distinctions between what is real and what is not real within these shots. By using this incongruous mixture of seemingly real and seemingly unreal events in the same space, Jancsó exploits the long take's inherent ability to effect a strong impression of reality.

Adding to the film's persuasive power is the presence of events that correspond to the course of Hungarian history during World War II. The Hungarian alliance with Nazi Germany is referred to at the outset of the film since the prime minister and Gábor are away at a meeting with Hitler. The arrival of war is conveyed as exploding bombs interrupt the film's sedate opening. The moral deprivation of Hungarian leadership is evident in the numerous machinations of the prime minister, Gábor and other officials. The rather late (1944), but nonetheless devastating Nazi occupation of Hungary and its mechanized extermination program are brutally portrayed. And the defeat of Axis forces is implied toward the end. No matter how abstractly presented, these events that parallel what we know as history resist interpretation as illusion and therefore help to prevent the viewer from continuously doubting the reality of what he/she is seeing.

As the film proceeds, the anomalous occasions increase in both frequency and in the degree to which they appear incongruous with their context. Since their effect is cumulative, a tension between the real and the unreal slowly builds through the film. We might even say that incongruity moves from the background in the early stages of the film, where in most cases it is manifest as only a minor component of a profuse *mise en scène,* to the foreground in the latter stages, where an extreme incongruity becomes the dominant characteristic of the major dramatic action. Always moving against viewer expectation, the film never fails to surprise. As this is particularly true of the concluding events, it is necessary to recount them in some detail.

At István's estate, the commander of the occupying forces tries to goad Mari into attempting escape. Mari steadfastly refuses. She then has a fantasy of István and herself shot down in each other's arms. After this romantic daydream ends, the commander offers to grant Mari a last request and she asks to be able to make love to István one last time. When the commander refuses, she tells him "any two" men will do. He allows her to choose two condemned compatriots, and then leaves them to their last pleasure. Mari asks the two men to kill her. The commander, meanwhile, stands inside the house looking through a window in which he envisions István, Mari, and others shooting at him with machine guns. He is told that the two men have drowned Mari in the lake and, moving outside, he orders her body to be riddled with bullets. Bombs explode. Back in the suddenly deserted house, István enters, carrying the flag. He moves outside toward the lake and finds it also deserted. Looking up he sees paratroopers fill the sky and he waves them on. At last István acts in accordance with the needs of the revolution. Or does he?

Until this point, the film follows what appears to be a relatively straightforward narrative, the three fantasy asides and the anomalous occasions included. What happens in the remaining two or three minutes of the film is astonishing. Jancsó plunges the viewer into total uncertainty by tracking the camera from István waving the flag, through the house, to the other side, where we witness a set-up identical to an earlier shot of a motionless Mari in the back seat of István's red sports car. Then, dressed in the suit he wore at the beginning

*István and Mari, before being shot down in her fantasy:* ALLEGRO BARBARO *Photo:* MOMA

of the film, István enters the frame, seats himself in the car, but, rather than placing his head in his arms on the steering wheel as before, he turns to Mari who rises, and they embrace. The key-light—the only artificial illumination in this shot—goes out, and the final shot follows. In a reprise of the end of the film's third shot, we see István (in the suit again) before the camera, positioned in a medium close-up. Bartók's piano piece (the source for the film's title, and hitherto present only in the third shot) is heard, the frame freezes, and the credits appear.

The perplexity experienced by the viewer is induced by an inescapable narrative illogic in the closing events of the film. More than ten minutes long, the penultimate shot contains an abundance of information: the commander attempting to convince Mari to escape, Mari's fantasy, the offer to grant a last request, the commander's fantasy, the discovery of Mari's body, bullets fired into that body, the appearance of István with the flag, the paratroopers, and the embrace between István and Mari in the car. It is the absence of cutting that makes the order of these events unacceptable in what the viewer had taken to be a realistic context. Were there cuts, the viewer might be able to accept this succession of events as a series of fragmented recollections of a controlling memory—in the manner of Resnais. But this is a single take in which whole armies disappear and appear in silence; István, after developing into a committed revolutionary, seems to revert to his old ways; and Mari drowns but then reappears to embrace István. We actually see Mari die twice if we include her fantasy. Paradoxically, this obvious fantasy by itself does not disconcert the viewer, but in the overall context of the shot adds to viewer confusion. Our ability to distinguish the obvious fantasy from other events adds supplementary credibility to the reality of everything not contained within it. If there were no fantasy asides at all, or if these fantasies were presented in no different a manner than all other events, then the entire shot, due to a uniform illogicality, could be read as surrealistic.

Preceding Mari's fantasy, mist fills the frame, acting as a transition between what we take to be real events and what we interpret as events imagined by Mari. Earlier, Jancsó uses the same device to introduce István's fantasy in which he and Mari are inside the circle of dancing peasants. The use of the mist as a transition device achieves the effect of something between a fade and a dissolve while allowing Jancsó to maintain the continuous take. Recognizing this connotation that the mist develops through the film does not, however, at first help the viewer to unravel the whole puzzle of real and imagined events within this shot. In fact, it tends to obscure these matters even more.

If we assume that all imagined events in the film are preceded by the mist-filled frame, what then do we make of the commander's obvious fan-

tasy, not preceded by any mist, in which István, Mari, and others shoot at him? Again, the shot seems impossibly nonsensical. Add the final shot of the film, the reprise of the tail end of the third shot, and Jancsó's challenge to the viewer is complete: Is this shot in present time? Is it a flashback? Is it an all too familiar post-textual credit sequence—footage consisting of music (the film's musical theme), freeze frame, and credits?

The answer lies in looking to, and through, the mist to uncover the structure of the entire film. The mist first appears at the end of the third shot as István stands before the camera in medium close-up. Significantly, the viewer tends to forget this on a first viewing of the film. Here there is an essential difference in the way Jancsó uses the mist: he cuts while it still fills the frame. At all other times, the mist functions to set off a *whole* fantasy sequence *within* a long take—from its beginning, marked by the mist's initial appearance, to its resolution which is brought about by a clearing of the mist, and the camera's return to its pre-fantasy position in which the daydreamer is framed. If we reason that the mist always works as a transition from real to imagined events, keeping in mind that the first use of the mist is not brought to its cleared-frame resolution until the last shot, then we can conclude that everything happening between the first appearnce of mist over István (shot #3) and the return to him in the same position without the mist (shot #22) is imagined. This is exactly how the film works.

Of the film's 22 shots the first three and the twenty-second are the only shots occurring in the present. This leaves shots 4 through 21 as an unbroken succession of imagined occurrences, or as Christian Metz would call them, "subjective inserts." Viewed in the context of dream-logic, the illogicality of seeing Mari dead, then alive, is perfectly acceptable. Even the lack of mist before the commander's fantasy (the last of the three fantasies within István's overall fantasy) makes sense among events controlled by a dreamer. As in Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* where disappearing men and dissolving walls are made acceptable through a controlling dream consciousness, all of the anomalous occasions of the film—mysterious hang gliders floating in space going nowhere; the sparse dwelling on István's estate; someone bouncing up and down on an unseen trampoline in the background; a brief low-angle slow-motion close-up of the legs of a woman dancing; a rigid posturing of the occupying soldiers that borders on absurdity; a motorized swing on which the peasants are given a circular ride to death—all these anomalous occasions are couched in a dream dimension, making them unobjectionable to even the strictest realists. Conversely, the events we had confidently interpreted as portrayals of historical fact during the years 1939–1945 are relegated to István's own remarkably accurate ruminations on the future from his standpoint of just before the war.

*Solitary hang glider. Photo:* MOMA

The crucial cut that marks the start of the subjective section transpires without our having any notion of its real significance. When this cut from István to a long shot of a lake occurs, it reads merely as a location change—when in fact it constitutes a

change in both point of view (from objective to subjective) and tense (from the present to a quasi-future conditional). The imperceptibility by which Jancsó brings off this shift enables him to structure 95 per cent of the film as István's dream of which the viewer is totally unaware, and, as a result, forces the viewer to interrogate his/her own experience of the entire film to a degree which is rare.

*Allegro Barbaro* deals with one man coming to terms with the contradictions of his life. Through his mind's eye we partake in the process by which he arrives at a recognition of his problem and its possible solution. The incident that helps set off his complicated interior process is his telling a soldier that Mari is his god-daughter. István's dishonest reluctance to acknowledge publicly their true relationship, indicative of his noncommittal stance at the beginning of the film, is the catalyst that helps make István begin to recognize the impossibility of a situation in which he attempts to straddle irreconcilable opposites. The first cut of the film accentuates this situation.

The opening shot is a simple pan left, which follows István driving his car to the prime minister's estate. Leading to the mansion is a bridge over water (an appropriate image which points up the feudal character of Hungarian society at the time: a moat). István drives the car only half-way across the bridge. He leaves the car in order to ask the whereabouts of the prime minister. Uncharacteristically, Jancsó abruptly cuts to a shot with the camera located off the left side at the center of the bridge, thereby underscoring István's dilemma of being caught between two sides. The correlation of István with the camera's unrealistic position (an unnatural position, suspended in mid-air over water) is augmented by the director's decision to hold this camera position, simply panning to follow István departing from the estate until he is out of the frame. The tension between the pull of opposing forces on István is elucidated in the very next shot.

After Mari's release, she and István, holding hands, but maintaining an innocent distance, walk away from the soldiers. As they approach István's car they move farther apart from each other until the car eventually comes between them and their hands separate. Mari does not take her eyes off István as she walks backwards up the road. Quite confused, István drives the car very slowly down the road toward the backward-tracking camera and away from Mari, his eyes focused on the rear view mirror. Once she is out of the frame (and out of the rear view mirror), István stops the car, gets out, and walks to the now stationary camera. At this point the mist enters the frame and the film becomes István's introspection.

It is obvious that István is far from being a committed revolutionary at the outset of the film—all the misgivings expressed about István's behavior by the prime minister, by Gábor, and by Mari's father are manifestations of István's self doubt. Fear of losing his individuality hinders István from joining the movement. A herd of grazing sheep situated in the background of the sixth and twenty-first shots (Mari in the car) highlight István's dread of conformity. A dialectic between collective action and individual action runs through the entire subjective section. As we see repeatedly, the problem for István is his inability to integrate individual acts with the collective movement. Preceding the death of Bankós, István tells Mari "I will carry out the sentence of millions" by assassinating the prime minister. Mari instructs him that he is wrong and that he should act "collectively." The camera tracks to Bankós giving a talk to a group of peasants on the need for responsible individual action in "exceptional cases" that require an "example in history." The talk completed with Bankós's point won, he puts theory into practice as he takes the flag and crosses into a prohibited zone to his death. The next shot follows quickly. István, acting too fast and thinking too slow, engages in behavior opposite to Bankós: the killing of the prime minister—an irresponsibly impulsive action because of István's failure to consider the possible consequences of his act. Killing the prime minister turns out to be both damaging (Mari's second arrest is a direct result) and futile. The camera's lateral tracking movement in this one-shot scene emphasizes the futility of István's action. After repeatedly tracking and panning left, right, left, right, and so forth, the camera, like István, finds itself at the end of the shot back in its starting position. Eventually, István arrives at a potential solution to his problem as he envisions

events that could only stem from a belief in the possibility of affecting a balance between collective and individual action.

As the subjective section of the film nears its end, István's commitment to the revolution coheres, and events in this dream world reflect his change of attitude. Hence, no mist precedes the commander's fantasy of his own shooting as this seems as much a possibility in the coming struggle as Mari's own death. The solitary hang gliders, symbols of directionless bourgeois individualism, are replaced by the liberating paratroopers whose definite direction and purpose unite with the new faith István expresses by waving them on. István's embrace of Mari is the quintessential form of his decision since Mari is the film's personification of collectivism as well as an individual woman.

In the last shot, back to reality, we see István stand before the camera and scrutinize his surroundings. Unlike his puzzled aspect in the third shot, here István wears a look of assurance. Bartók's piano piece—the same piece contained in the earlier *Cantata* and *Elektreia,* which has become for Jancsó something of a victory march of the proletariat—plays again, but at this point in the film there is an underlying unity between music and image: Bartók's first music to assimilate folk influences and István's own assimilation into the peasant movement. As this is the second film of a projected trilogy (the first, *Hungarian Rhapsody,* has not yet been shown in this country), we await the next film to see how István carries out his resolve.

*Allegro Barbaro* is a remarkable accomplishment. The dream structure is one of many challenges in the film. A seemingly infinite variety of invention only begins to become apparent on subsequent viewings. The film's formal rigor is stunning. Like István, Jancsó has recognized the need to temper the collective (montage) with the individual (shot). While he may still have some distance to cover before he attains a true balance, the Hungarian director has discovered a new, unique, dynamic relationship between montage and *mise en scene,* and in doing so has infused a much needed vitality into contemporary cinema.

—WILLIAM KELLY

ALLEGRO BARBARO: *István about to greet the liberating paratroopers. Photo:* MOMA

## HUNGARIAN RHAPSODY

**(Magyar Rapszodia) Director: Miklós Jancsó. Screenplay: Gyula Hernádi, Miklós Jancsó. Photography: János Kende. Editor: Zsuzsa Csakany.**

Since Miklós Jancsó won a golden palm for directing *Red Psalm,* he has become the choreographer laureate of Hungarian history. With two installments of a trilogy (unlikely to be completed), he has paid homage to two of his countrymen who both tried to find in the countryside solid founda-